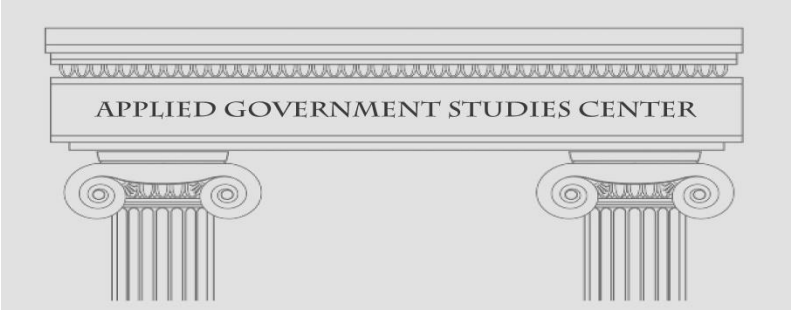

Notes on Organizing and Commanding a State Guard Infantry Company

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Introduction

These notes are from my experience of having the honor and privilege of organizing and serving as the first company commander of R Company [Williamsburg-Yorktown Infantry Company], 4th Battalion, 2nd Brigade [George Washington Brigade] of the Virginia Defense Force, with the rank of Captain, during a 1987 expansion of that state guard. They also include notes from a more recent state senate meeting that requested my input on the potential value of creating a state guard.

They are published to offer insight and real life observations to those who might someday find themselves in a similar situation and command responsibility. This report might also be helpful to state executives and legislators considering establishing a state guard.

On State Guards

State Guards, also known as State Dense Forces or State Militias, are organized and controlled by state governments with the encouragement by the federal government. The volunteers in the forces train without pay but are paid when called to active duty by a governor. They are available to fill a role in state and national homeland security if called upon.

Organization structures, uniforms and ranks are similar to those in the U.S. military and national guards. There may be infantry, air and naval units depending on individual state force structures. They are considered to be National Guard reserves. They cannot be federalized.

All states have constitutional and legislative authority to activate a state militia but some states have not chosen to do so.

Two observed reasons appear prominent in state hesitancy to establish a defense force:

1. Opposition from state national guards that argue that they have sufficient troop strength and resources to conduct any potential operations without reserve forces. They may also be concerned a non-paid volunteer militia might affect their budgets and career opportunities.
2. Concern of some elected officials that a state guard might become a radical anti-government armed militia. Any one associated with state guard volunteers knows that fear is unfounded.

Hopefully states without an organized state militia will never deal with a catastrophic disaster that will cause them to regret their reluctance to act.

State guard missions are similar to those of Virginia:

- Provide for an adequately trained organized reserve militia to assume control of National Guard facilities and to secure any federal and state property left in place after mobilization of the National Guard.

- Assist in the mobilization of the National Guard.
- Provide a military force to respond to the call of the governor in the event of disasters and emergencies described in authorizing legislation.

The emphasis of defense force training and preparedness is on emergency and disaster operations in a manner to support or integrate with National Guard units, or in case of out-of-state deployment, to replace regular guard units.

On Militia Leadership

Historically militia unit leaders and commanders require leadership skills unique in military services. Whether appointed to the position like Florence Militia General Michelangelo in 1529 or elected like Illinois Militia Captain Abraham Lincoln in 1832, they must have the leadership ability to recruit, retain, and train and, if need be, lead into harm's way, citizen volunteers, without reliance on tradition military disciplinary support. Often at their own expense.

State militia company commanders cannot rely on a uniform code of military justice, court marshals, stockades nor brigs to enforce discipline or deter insubordination. Nor can they reward compliance with pay or pension incentives. They can reward performance with praise, pride and promotion. Dissatisfied state guard volunteers can quite the service anytime or transfer to other companies. There are no legally binding commitments to remain in a militia. In reality the commitment is day-to-day.

Successful militia unit leaders demonstrate ability in inspire, motivate and earn the respect and trust of their troops.

On the Militia Company

The key unit for many, if not most state defense forces, is the company. It is a basic recruitment, training and operational command within a state militia table of organization.

Militia company commanders therefor have greater span of responsibility than counter parts in regular military forces. A state guard could not exceed without company commanders that are successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

On Recruitment

Company commanders typically recruit from an assigned county, city or other geographical area. The volunteer recruits seem to be mainly from two groups: [1] those with prior military service and [2] those who wanted to serve in the military in the past but were for some reason unable. One trait all recruits appear to present is a willingness to leave family, friends, business and recreation to volunteer to serve their community, state and country in uniform and mostly without pay.

Successful recruitment depends heavily on making potential volunteers aware of the opportunity to serve. Web based marketing, news media announcements, event recruitment tables and traditional recruitment posters placed in public places can be useful awareness methods. Company commanders need to be creative in recruitment marketing in addition to excellent leadership skills.

It is not necessary to recruit a full sized infantry company of 100 or more troops to be operational for most emergency deployments. A cadre of platoon leaders, squad leaders and other ranks totaling about 20-25 can be filled in during sand bagging, beans beds and blankets distribution or other similar emergency operations with temporary citizen volunteers assigned to squads and platoons led by company officers and NCOs.

On Militia Culture

Anyone with a military background commissioned as a state guard officer may have to make an adjustment in their expectations of militia culture. Although the uniforms appear familiar, the differences in military courtesies and leadership styles may not be.

The militia culture can be described as more similar to those of civilian police and fire departments. While they wear uniforms, have ranks and follow chains of

commands, they are not expected to stand at attention when a higher ranking officer enters, address an officer in the third person or with the word “sir”. Saluting is reserved for special ceremonies. But they still accomplish their dangerous missions as admirably well organized and disciplined public servants.

On Training

The limited time available for training of the state guard volunteers needs to be focused on accomplishing the guard’s missions with emphasis on disaster and emergency operations. Defense forces are not trained for direct combat operations.

However, some combat support related training in the syllabus may help with recruitment, retention and comradery. It could give the troops a sense of belonging to a military force.

One type of training infantry troops seem to find interesting and enjoyable is patrolling and reconnaissance in the field. Both night and day. This type of training is applicable to both combat support and disaster operations. Particularly useful to both operations is accurate situational reporting.

State guard companies can be crossed trained as Community Emergency Response Teams. These FEMA encouraged local volunteers are trained and organized to provide disaster and emergency assistance when first responders are not immediately available. More information on CERT training can be found in the report “Model Community Emergency Response Team [CERT] Organization Chart and Training” published at the Applied Government Studies Center web site. [www.agscenter.org]

On the Experience

Reporting for duty as a state militia infantry company commander has it challenges and awesome responsibilities but it may be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. You will lead citizen volunteers that will be among the finest people you will ever know.